



Authority and The Good Life

Do You Realize What God Has Done in You?

When I was in my first year of college, I came across a verse that disturbed me. It was Colossians 3:8 and the verse commanded that all Christians get rid of filthy language. My life with Christ at the time was expanding and my loyalty to Him growing day by day. I was taking seriously prayer and obedience to the Bible and God, so I knew I had to make a decision about my habit of swearing. I never cursed in church and didn't in front of my parents either. On the basketball court though, at school or while out with my friends, I regularly swore and often cursed in my thoughts too. It was clear to me that my cursing was not an uncontrollable urge, but it did rule over me. The question was not so much whether I could stop swearing, it was more tied to what I wanted out of my life. How important was it to me to live for Christ and what sacrifices would I make to follow Him whole-heartedly? What I didn't realize then and often forget now is that the power to change is more a spiritual battle than anything else and if I truly wanted to be a different guy, I needed God working in me for that to happen. I think I could have stopped swearing on my own, at least in most settings, but what I soon realized was that what I really wanted was not a slowing down of some of my bad, unchristian habits but I wanted a whole new me. That was a big task, and one only Christ could accomplish if it were to be done right.

Our passage insists that Jesus Christ rules over all powers and authorities, both spiritual as well as physical. **and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** (Ephesians 1:19-23 NIV) There is no force or kingdom that makes Him bend in submission. Daniel 7: 13-14 presents the same declaration. **"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.** Daniel saw what we know now. Jesus is the ruler over all things, and He cannot be stopped or defeated. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28: 19. **All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.** His say is final on any matter. Christ is completely in charge.

Christ is superior to any other being or force whether it be rulers or authorities or powers or lords of any sort. Literally He is above-them all. If there is an above that is above, that is who Jesus is. No devil or demon, no angel or king, no ruler or great mind can even approach the authority and power of Jesus. Jesus has no rival, no opposite, no threat. He is not a yin to a yang, He is without peer, without competitor. Jesus stands alone above all and we have Him at every moment being for us.

You live in a world that always has someone grabbing for power over you. If it isn't political leaders like those in China, North Korea and many here in the US, it is corporate leaders who are trying to manipulate you and control your behaviors and attitudes. Sometimes, you may feel like a puppet on a string being pulled here and there and yet, the Bible tells us that no one can take you out of the hands of Jesus; no force can clobber Him and yank you away from your Savior. Not only that, but spiritual forces like the devil and demons try to control you, but they cannot, they have no authority over you either. Jesus alone is LORD and He protects you as Savior. Salvation cannot be stopped in you because Christ controls it and runs it.

There is a critical point that must be made regarding the passage from Ephesians; one we touched on last week, but this week we will expand on it. To see it clearly, we will go to another passage, one found in 1 Corinthians 1. **Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."** (1 Corinthians 1:26-31 NIV) Let this sink in for a moment. At first glance, you may feel insulted by this comment if you are a born again Christian. You are told here that very few Christians are cool people, the intellectuals, the powerful, the wealthy, the vastly talented. Some are, but most aren't. You aren't a part of God's Kingdom because He needs you or is impressed by your characteristics. He didn't hope you would choose His salvation because you were such a great catch. It is your weaknesses and shortcomings that define you as God's children far more than your strengths. If you don't get the point here, consider Jesus' disciples. A despised tax-collector, lowly fishermen, a radical revolutionary and other no-names who we know only because Christ chose them as part of the Twelve.

Let's take a quick look at one of the more talked about converts described in the Gospels. Luke 19 records the monumental turnaround to the tax collector Zacchaeus. He famously repented so profoundly that when Christ invited himself over to Zacchaeus's house for lunch, the despised tax-collector immediately announced that he was giving half of all he owned to the poor and would return four times whatever he owed those he cheated in his tax collecting. We all celebrate this great show of repentance and use him as an example of how we should be. Yet, we fail to notice Jesus' statement of what transpired. He declared, **"Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."** (Luke 19: 9-10 NIV) Do not too swiftly move past this profound pronouncement. Salvation came to Zacchaeus. That is why he did what he did. The Lord Jesus came and saved what was lost. That was why Zacchaeus made this great turnaround. It wasn't Zacchaeus's inner powers that did this work. It was Christ from beginning to end who created the reboot. God's salvation made Zacchaeus into a new man and it could never be viewed any other way.

You may not be aware of what took place during the seventies in Cambodia. The Communist regime, the Khmer Rouge, took over the country and while they ruled, killed or starved to death more than two million of the eight million people of Cambodia. Out of the 11,000 university students, only 450 survived the communist genocide, just 5% of the high school students. One of those who made it through was Christopher LaPel who eventually became a pastor. A convert who came to Christ in LaPel's church was Hang Pin, a man in his mid-fifties. Hang Pin was depressed and broken hearted. His wife was bayoneted to death by the Khmer Rouge and Hang was stabbed in the back but survived. Hang Pin after becoming Christian was a completely different person. He took part in every Bible study, eagerly read the Scriptures, and after finishing the Bible class returned to his village and started a church. Soon fourteen families were a part of the church and all his children were baptized as believers. When he and his family had to move to a refugee camp because of military violence, he saved "countless lives" by helping end a typhoid outbreak. His efforts to help others in the refugee camp were honored by camp officials.

One day the pastor who had baptized Hang Pin got a call from an American journalist. It turned out that Hang Pin had been a notorious leader of a torture and execution center run by the Khmer Rouge. He personally ordered the murder of more than 14,000 prisoners. Many were tortured with electric shocks, suffocation and beatings with electric cords. Babies were dropped from balconies. Children had their heads bashed in with shovels. When Hang Pin was taken into custody, he wept over his crimes and confessed to them all. Pin was sent to prison for life. He feels the weight of his crimes every day but he shares the Gospel with everyone in the prison, guards and prisoners alike. His pastor, LaPel, tells of the joy Hang Pin has. He says that despite the chains and bars, because of Christ, he is a free man. When asked by the judges determining Hang Pin's fate whether he thought Hang Pin's transformation was real, LaPel swore on oath it was. What makes this account so amazing is that the very Khmer Rouge that Hang Pin served, killed LaPel's parents, his brother and his sister. LaPel had tremendous justification for hating Hang Pin for all he had done. He didn't. He loved him. LaPel saw the same Christ living within Hang Pin as was in him. For both, the murderer and the pastor, Christ and His salvation makes all sinners new and eventually perfect in every way.

You and I are in the same boat. Our salvation is entirely due to Christ and we can't take any credit for it. He is the one who is remaking us and moving us toward perfection. We have nothing to offer Jesus in the way of benefit to Him. Salvation is completely one-sided. All Christ, all the way. Consider this. Because all power is His and no authority or foe can stand against Jesus, you have something you must never dismiss or disregard. His authority and power is given to you. In other words, you have Him living in you and whatever He wants to do through you cannot be stopped. No habit that needs to be broken can defeat you. No bad behavior of yours that must end can withstand His strength in you. No demonic power can drag you down. In Christ, you are a conqueror and not a failure, you are a victor and not a loser. It is time for you to take your stand. You have a battle you are fighting, and it will not end in defeat. You have a foe that is going against you that cannot win. Take a moment to regroup. Put your hope in Christ to get this work that is before you done. Fight addiction. Battle anger, lust, depression. Stand up to Satan. Stand up to the demon forces of evil. Stand up to your worst foe and trust Christ to give you what you need. Victoriously fight with faith in Him to see you through this. Nothing short of perfection is God's plan for you. Accept your destiny!